

'Clearly and Calmly' or 'Calmly and Clearly' : Is There a Preferred Order ?

著者 (英)	ADAMS Keith
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Keith Adams

This study reports a research project that sought to address student questions about the target structure illustrated in the title above—*clearly and calmly*—which arose in a Japanese university EFL writing class. The inquiry was directed to investigating whether the adverbs could occur freely in either position or if one order would be preferred over another. A preliminary corpus study of 16 manner adverbs revealed that although the syntactic positions appeared to be flexible, some adverbs seemed to be preferred in the first position and the semantic characteristics of the adverbs may have been a factor in the preference. In light of these findings, a questionnaire survey was given to 32 native English speakers (NS). The results of the questionnaire indicated that the NS had statistically significant preferences for the adverbs in the target structure. The results of the findings are discussed from linguistic and pedagogical perspectives.

The catalyst for the research to be discussed in this paper emerged from student questions concerning the order of two manner adverbs (MAs) joined by the conjunction, *and*, as seen in the title of this study. Is either option acceptable? Or would one be preferred over the other? If so, why?

Providing students with answers to these questions proved to be far more challenging than had been envisioned at the outset of the inquiry. The nature of the challenge can be illustrated by examining the classroom context where the issue was first encountered in more detail.

The students were Japanese university undergraduates enrolled in a course in essay writing. The course textbook, *Significant Scribbles* (2005) included a unit dealing with the use of two or more adjectives in a single phrase, followed by a unit focusing on the target structure of this paper. Sentences (1a) and (1b) below are examples included in the respective units of the textbook, whereas (1c) and (1d) reverse the positions of the two adjectives and MAs, respectively, for the purposes of this study.

- (1) a. My tall German friend works in an automobile company.
b. If my father comes home, you should hide in the closet quickly and quietly.
c. My German tall friend works in an automobile company.
d. If my father comes home, you should hide in the closet quietly and quickly.

Can (1c) and (1d) be judged as acceptable sentences? Most readers would agree that (1c) might be questionable as it is contrary to the generally accepted order of multiple adjectives in a noun phrase. That is, adjectives of size (*tall*) normally precede adjectives of origin (*German*).

Turning to (1d), although this alternative may be possible, it seems to require more mental processing or context for a reader than (1b). However, finding a convenient explanation for this proved to be quite elusive during the first stages of the original investigation. Although several reference grammars contained various examples of the structure, only indirect references or comments relevant to the point in question here were offered.

For example, the *Collins COBUILD English Grammar* (2006) includes several target structure sentences, such as :

- (3) a. She sang clearly and beautifully. (6.14)
b. You must be able to speak fluently and correctly. (6.37)

The problem from this researcher's perspective was that commentary about the sentences related to using a conjunction to link adverbs of the same type (3a), and the use of manner adverbs in general as a means "to describe how something is done (3b).

Similarly, *The Cambridge Grammar of English* (2006) contains several sec-

tions relating to the preferred order of adjuncts, but discussion did not focus on the target structure. The following examples are taken from sections 326b and 326c, respectively.

- (4) a. A group of women protested angrily outside the parliament building yesterday.
b. I just wanted to live my life quietly, independently and with the minimum of disruption.

Although (4a) is useful in that it points out a neutral order for multiple adjuncts, *angrily* is not paired with another MA. Similarly, even though (4b) contains two MAs, they are not in the target structure and the aim of the example was to illustrate the principle that longer prepositional phrases come after shorter adjuncts.

In sum, though many examples of the use of MAs were found and the treatment of grammatical points suggested potential factors relevant to the focus of this paper, the reference grammars did not examine the specific question of a neutral or preferred order of the adverbs in the target structure.

Given this situation, two other avenues of investigation were taken. The first was a pilot corpus study that formed the basis for a questionnaire survey of native speakers of English, which, in turn, sought to explore the preliminary findings of the corpus data.

Research Questions

This research project was undertaken with two complementary goals in mind. The first was from a linguistic perspective, while the second was driven by pedagogical concerns :

1. Are there factors that influence the order of the manner adverbs?
2. Can the linguistic research data provide a framework for teaching the target structure ?

In order to pursue these goals, the following research question was formulated :

1. Can a manner adverb in the target structure occur freely in either posi-

tion ?

Null Hypothesis

(1) There is no restriction in the position of an adverb in the target structure.

(1) Alternative Hypothesis

The semantic characteristics of the manner adverbs influence their positions in the target structure.

Preliminary Study

Method

This study, Adams (2011), gathered data by means of a random sampling from the British National Corpus (BNC). The line of inquiry began by using classifications of manner adverbs from the *COBUILD English Grammar (2006)* as the basis for the selection of adverbs for the data collection.

COBUILD places adverbs of manner into three categories according to whether they describe the way something is done (5a), describe feelings and manner (5b), or indicate the circumstances of an event (5c).

- (5) a. He did it very carefully. (6.37)
b. She laughed happily. (6.39)
c. I need to speak to you privately. (6.41)

Adverbs of manner from the first two categories were chosen for this study since they were the types of MAs used in the course textbook, though a modification was made regarding the items in the first category.

In order to explore the possible influence of semantic characteristics on the positions of the MAs, three distinct groups were created—*Speed*, *Sound* and *How*—from the COBUILD category of adverbs that describe the way in which something was done.

In line with this criterion, 11 items were selected from the COBUILD lists, as well as five other MAs—gradually, loudly, noisily, quickly, and slowly—not included in the lists. These 16 adverbs were placed in four groups based on a semantic association as seen in Table 1.

It is acknowledged that some adverbs could be placed in a different cate-

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Table 1 Semantic Association Groups

Association	Speed	Sound	How	Feeling
	gradually	loudly	carefully	calmly
	slowly	noisily	clearly	confidently
	quickly	quietly	freely	eagerly
	swiftly	silently	easily	nervously

gory. For example, *carefully* and *calmly* might also be attributed to 'speed' in the sense that being careful or calm might suggest doing something slowly or gradually. While recognizing alternate interpretations, the adverbs were grouped in accordance to what was deemed as the primary association.

The 16 MAs were then entered into the BNC's Simple Search tool in two keyword forms to mirror the target structure : e.g. *quickly and*; *and quickly*. The BNC random selection offers 50 samples of the keywords from the total number present in the entire database. For instance, the database contained 882 samples of *quickly and*. Two of the randomly selected samples are seen in (6a) and (6b).

- (6) a. We all learned very quickly and we learned how to do it fairly quickly.
 b. He turned the car into Park Lane and drove quickly and skillfully through ...

Sentences that contained the target structure, such as (6b), were selected for analysis in the database of this study.

Results and Discussion

The results of the data collection can be seen in Tables 2 and 3. Both tables show the frequency of the adverbs' position before or after the conjunction *and* (hereafter referred to as the *MA1* and *MA2* positions) and the total number of occurrences of the manner adverbs in the target structure. However, the adverbs are grouped according to whether the difference in the occurrence of a MA in one position or the other is statistically significant (Table 2) or not (Table 3).

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Table 2 Significant Differences Occurrences from BNC Samples

Adverb	MA1 Position	MA2 Position	Total
swiftly	35	14	49
clearly	34	14	48
calmly	30	10	40
slowly	29	6	35
gradually	15	2	17

Note. MA1=before the conjunction *and* ; MA2=after the conjunction *and*.

Table 3 Non-significant Differences Occurrences from BNC Samples

Adverb	MA1 Position	MA2 Position	Total
easily	18	25	43
silently	21	19	40
quietly	17	20	37
freely	20	16	36
loudly	17	19	36
confidently	12	20	32
carefully	15	15	30
quickly	16	11	27
noisily	8	4	12
eagerly	9	3	12
nervously	1	3	4

Note. MA1=before the conjunction *and* ; MA2=after the conjunction *and*.

In order to test for statistical significance, the results for each MA were converted to percentages and a one-sample t-test between percentages (two-tailed) was employed. The results of this test put the 16 adverbs into the respective groups.

With reference to the MAs in Table 3, the median t-statistic was not significant at the .05 critical alpha level, $t(27)=0.881$, $p=0.456$. Thus the null hypothesis failed to be rejected, that is, chance variation likely accounted for

the positions of the MAs.

As for the five adverbs in Table 2, the median t-statistic was significant, $t(36)=4.028, p=.001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This suggests that chance alone did not account for the differences in the positions of the MAs in the target structure.

It is interesting to note that all of the MAs in Table 2 occurred more frequently in the MA1 position of the target structure. Furthermore, three of the five adverbs came from the semantic group associated with the quality of speed ; thus, possibly indicating that the semantic factor proposed in the alternative hypothesis may have influenced this tendency. However, this factor could not be confirmed by the relatively limited database from the pilot study.

Nonetheless, the results of the study led to an attempt to test the alternative hypothesis by means of a questionnaire survey given to Native English Speakers (NS).

Before moving on to that discussion, one final comment about the corpus data deserves mention in relation to the pedagogical goal of this study. Even though chance may likely have accounted for the distributions of 11 of the 16 adverbs, the results seen in Table 3 are potentially quite useful pedagogically.

This point will be included later in this paper in a discussion of a framework for instruction. However, in brief, the frequency in which these adverbs occurred in the target structure can be seen. This information, in turn, can serve as a practical reference to guide a teacher in the selection of adverbs to be used in instruction.

The Native English Speaker Questionnaire Survey

The purpose of this survey was to test the alternative hypothesis that semantic characteristics may influence the order of MAs in the target structure.

The 32 native English speakers (NS) in the survey were all English teachers from various universities in Japan. Although the nationality of the teachers was not treated as a variable in this study, the breakdown of the NS was : United Kingdom (10), United States (10), Australia (5), Canada (5), Ire-

land (1) and New Zealand (1).

The participants provided responses to a 10-item questionnaire by indicating their preferences in the positions of the 16 MAs in Tables 2 and 3. Item 1 (below) of the questionnaire serves as an example of the format. The remaining items in the questionnaire can be seen in the Appendix.

1. *The student ate his breakfast ____ and ____.*

a. *noisily* b. *quickly*

Respondents indicated their preferences by writing *a-b* or *b-a* in the spaces.

Design of the Questionnaire Items

The choice of adverb pairings in the questionnaire items was based on contrasts between the four semantic groups in Table 1. For example, in Item 1 above, *Sound* (noisily) is contrasted with *Speed* (quickly).

Another important point concerning these contrasts was that MAs from the *Speed* category were included in six of the ten items. This was equal to the number of *How* adverbs, but two more than the *Feelings* and *Sound* adverbs. Once again, this decision was taken due to the corpus data, which revealed that the position of three of the four *Speed* adverbs was statistically significant.

As for the specific sentences included in the questionnaire, eight sentences that approximated those found in the BNC samples were used. This involved some rephrasing of the samples, including a reduction of sentence length or substitution of a manner adverb with a similar adverb from one of the four semantic groups of this study. The final two items were adaptations taken from other sources that included adverbs from the four categories.

Results and Discussion

In contrast to the results of the corpus pilot study, where chance was a likely factor in the distributions of the majority of manner adverbs, the first notable finding of the questionnaire survey was that the respondents had clear

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Table 4 The Preferred Order of MAs from the NS Questionnaire

Item Number	Preferred Order	Percentage
4	calmly-carefully	90
1	quickly-noisily	83
2	slowly-quietly	83
7	quickly-easily	83
8	gradually-nervously	79
5	swiftly-silently	76
6	loudly-clearly	76
9	slowly-clearly	76
10	easily-eagerly	66
3	freely-confidently	59

preferences. Table 4 shows the specific MA pairings in the 10 questionnaire items and the preferred order as expressed by a percentage.

Once again, when these percentages were individually analyzed for statistical significance by means of a one-sample t-test (two-tailed), the t-statistic was not significant for the mean of items 10 and 3 at the .05 critical alpha level, $t(31)=1.523, p=.138$. On the other hand, when the same test and procedure was performed on the other 8 items, the difference between the mean of the preferred orders shown above and the alternative choices was significant, $t(31)=4.47, p=.001$.

A second noteworthy finding seen in Table 4 was that adverbs from the *Speed* category always preceded adverbs from the other three categories (Items 1, 2, 5, 7, 8 and 9) and, as stated in the preceding paragraph, the preferences were statistically significant.

In sum, the Native Speaker responses suggest that :

- 1) Although either order of the manner adverbs may be acceptable, one order seems to be more appropriate or natural to most NS.
- 2) MAs that describe *speed* are likely to precede adverbs from the other semantic groups.

Therefore, it is proposed that the latter point seems to support the alter-

native hypothesis that the semantic characteristics of two MAs may determine their respective positions in the target structure.

Interpretation of the Data

In his introduction to *The Syntax of Adjuncts* (2002), Thomas Ernst maintained that adverbs have been a problematic area in syntactical and semantic analysis for decades and he stated "... almost everyone who has looked at the overall landscape has felt obliged to observe what a swamp it is." (p. 1)

The mixed findings presented in this paper certainly seem to underscore the "swamp" metaphor. Nevertheless, the results of this data collection do offer some direction for tentative speculation to address the linguistic and pedagogical goals of this study.

In the next section, I will focus on the syntactical/semantic domain and discuss the two sets of data with reference to Ernst's analysis of adverbials in his studies.

Ernst (2000), as cited in Schäfer (2002), first proposed the following interpretation of the nature of the types of adverbs examined in this paper.

The difference between Pure Manner adverbs and those which can have both clausal and manner readings thus often seems to hinge on whether the ADJ predicate selects events that are restricted to purely physical manifestations (as with *loudly*) or whether a wider (often metaphorical) usage is allowed [...] Therefore, whether or not an adverb is of the Pure Manner type depends on whether it has acquired a metaphorical meaning in this way. (p. 317)

This explanation may suggest guidelines to account for likely preferences in the order of a pair of MAs. This point will be pursued by an analysis of the two sets of sentences below in light of Ernst's interpretation.

- (7) a. I sat down slowly and painfully.
b. *I sat down painfully and slowly.
- (8) a. She spoke clearly and calmly.
b. She spoke calmly and clearly.

In (7a), *slowly* seems more restricted to a physical manifestation than *painfully*. In other words, *slowly* refers to the speed of the action, whereas *painfully* has a wider reading which includes why the speaker sat down at such a speed. That is, the speaker was in or felt a sudden pain and the act of sitting exacerbated the discomfort. Therefore one would expect the speaker to sit down slowly due to the pain.

If one accepts that (7b) is less neutral than (7a), the reason may be that it is difficult to give *painfully* a pure manner (PM) reading, at least with the verb *sit down* and paired with *slowly*.

If so, in a sentence where one adverb that allows for a PM reading is coupled with another adverb that can take a wider, clausal reading, the PM adverb will normally be first, as in (7a). Turning to the next set of sentences (8a/b), how can they be read according to this proposition?

At first glance, it seems that both sentences are perfectly acceptable. As discussed above, (7b) may be possible in a given context, but (7a) is the default or neutral order of the two MAs. However, one does not have to place either of the two sequences of MAs in (8a) or (8b) in a particular context in order for them to be acceptable.

One possible explanation is that the adverbs can allow both a pure manner and an extended reading. That is, *clearly*, could be used to describe the physical quality of precise articulation in (8a), while in (8b) it might refer to the expression of logical or easily understood thoughts or argumentation (extended). Similarly, *calmly* might suggest a smooth, well-paced speaking speed (PM reading) or a relaxed, controlled emotional state while speaking.

Further support for this proposition can be seen in the results of the BNC data collection for two other adverbs in this study, *quickly* and *quietly*. Although both can clearly take pure manner readings, the occurrence of the adverbs in the MA1 position was not statistically significant. This suggests that the adverbs also allow a wider reading.

To conclude this section, the distinction between pure manner and metaphorical readings and how this distinction may influence the positions of the MAs seems to be very relevant to goals of this study.

For example, if this interpretation is applied to the results of the NS questionnaire preferences, it could offer an explanation as to why *speed* adverbs preceded all MAs from the other semantic groups. In other words, the pure manner reading of *quickly*, *slowly*, *gradually* and *swiftly* was seen as the preferred choice by the respondents.

The Pedagogical Goal

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings in this study contributed to practical applications. Although an all-encompassing rule remained elusive, a pedagogical tool to interpret the order of the MAs was revealed. An awareness of how the semantic characteristics of the adverbs may effect their positions can help a teacher to analyze choices and make suggestions if a choice seems awkward or overly context dependent.

However, perhaps the primary pedagogical challenge is to how to transmit this awareness to students. Unlike the rule for the sequence of two or more adjectives, which is clear and can be explained in simple terms to even low English proficiency level students, the case of the MAs in this study is much more ambiguous.

That is, the findings in the present study have shown that one cannot accurately say that the positions of the MAs are completely interchangeable, though in many (if not most) cases they are ! So where does this leave a teacher when confronted with having to explain a preference for an alternate order?

To understand the factors influencing the distribution of the MAs involves a great deal of meta-language and linguistic background knowledge to assimilate. Clearly, the concepts of *physical manifestation* and *wider, metaphorical usage* as discussed previously in this paper are rather abstract, even if a teacher could explain the terms to the students in their L1.

In order to overcome this problem, students could be presented with selected sample sentences of MAs to illustrate the two key concepts above in simple terms. One option for lower-level English proficiency students is to

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offer the following sentences.

- (11) a. Lisa spoke loudly.
b. Lisa spoke quickly.

In these two sentences, the teacher can point out that the MAs are describing the verb, in terms of the qualities of *sound* and *speed*. Then a contrast could be made with :

- (12) a. Lisa spoke calmly.
b. Lisa spoke nervously.

Here the main focus of the MAs is on the subject and they describe Lisa's emotional state while speaking. In other words, it is a multi-faceted description that includes physical qualities but is not limited to them.

This step could be followed by various tasks to allow the students to transfer the key concepts by experimenting and producing sentences in the target structure. Lower-level students could be given lists of selected MAs, such as some of the high frequency MAs seen in the pilot study BNC data, and even verbs for a semi-controlled task. For more advanced students, the teacher could provide multiple examples as part of a 'noticing' task for analysis before they are given a production task. Samples collected from various corpora could provide a quick, convenient means to gather adequate data for the students to analyze.

Of course, the principle that any manner adverb could occur in either position due to emphasis, for example, remains valid, but presenting the MAs in an instructional framework as suggested here can provide a convenient 'rule of thumb' for students and teachers whenever a question might arise.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

The NS Questionnaire provided adequate data for analysis ; however, an expanded database could provide more evidence to evaluate the findings reported here. Such a database could be obtained by increasing the number of respondents or by increasing the number of questionnaire items.

Similarly, expanding the scope of the corpus search could be fruitful. At

the very least, it could provide further samples of other MAs to expand the pool of adverbs for a revised NS Questionnaire.

Another line of investigation would be to examine the influence of the verb on a particular pairing of MAs. This point was raised earlier in the analysis of the sentence *She sat down painfully and slowly*.

It was argued that it would be difficult to give *painfully* a pure manner reading with the verb *sit down* and paired with *slowly*, which can clearly take a pure manner reading. That is to say, rather than employing a one dimensional approach focusing on the adverb pairings alone, as was essentially taken in this study, an analysis of any effect the verb might exert on the adverbs may be insightful. Would *sit down* 'attract' *slowly* into the MA1 position? And would *slowly* still take the same position if it were paired with *carefully*, an adverb that allows a pure manner and metaphorical reading?

Conclusions

Although the findings in this study cannot be said to be totally conclusive at this stage of investigation, valuable information concerning both the linguistic and pedagogical goals of the research was obtained.

With regard to the Null Hypothesis that the MAs could occur freely, it can be argued that this is generally the case for many of the adverbs examined here. Nevertheless, even though either position is possible, the responses from the NS Questionnaire strongly indicated that there was a statistically significant preferred order in 8 of the 10 items.

Furthermore, the choices for all 10 items could be interpreted by taking the semantic characteristics of the MAs into account. Thus, the alternate hypothesis is supported. Semantic characteristics seem to influence the syntactic positions of adverbs in the target structure, but what is the nature of those characteristics?

The criterion for semantic characteristics in this study was an association with a quality—*speed*, *sound*—or common denominator—*how* (something is done), and *feelings*. This classification did result in a notable finding from the

NS questionnaire responses in which *speed* MAs always preceded adverbs from the other three groups.

As interesting as this finding is in its own right, perhaps its true value is that it points to a general, underlying principle to account for the syntactic positions of the adverbs. The distinction between whether an adverb is restricted to a pure manner reading or can be extended to a metaphorical reading also emerged as a relevant, practical tool for analysis of the target structure.

In sum, the main conclusion to be drawn from the syntactic analysis was that manner adverbs could occur in either position in the target structure, but the NS responses suggested that one order might be preferred over another due to the semantic characterizations of the adverbs.

As for the pedagogical goals of the study, the findings did allow this writer to formulate an explanation to help guide choices in the order of the MAs, and design an approach for presenting instructional material in an accessible format to the students.

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Appendix

The Native Speaker Questionnaire Which order do you prefer ?

- Complete the sentences.
 - Write 'a-b' or 'b-a' in the spaces.
1. The student ate his breakfast ____ and ____.
a. noisily b. quickly
 2. He opened the door ____ and ____.
a. quietly b. slowly
 3. To pass the interview, you have to speak ____ and ____.
a. confidently b. freely
 4. She answered our questions ____ and ____.
a. calmly b. carefully
 5. I have never seen an army move so ____ and ____.
a. silently b. swiftly
 6. His father spoke to him ____ and ____.
a. clearly b. loudly
 7. If you order online, you can get it ____ and ____.
a. easily b. quickly
 8. The police surrounded the house ____ and ____.
a. gradually b. nervously
 9. She told me to sing it again ____ and ____.
a. clearly b. slowly
 10. They learned the new game ____ and ____.
a. eagerly b. easily